

APPARATUS FOR ALIGNING AND  
DISPENSING SOLDER COLUMNS IN AN ARRAY

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

The present invention relates generally to column  
5 grid arrays for semiconductor packaging and more  
particularly, to an apparatus for aligning and dispensing a  
plurality of solder columns in an array. After alignment,  
the solder columns are positioned in an array of  
corresponding electrically conductive contact pads or  
10 terminals disposed on one side of a ceramic substrate. The  
solder columns are reflowed in an oven and then, attached  
to the substrate to form a ceramic column grid array  
package.

As the density of electronic devices on integrated  
15 circuits has continued to increase, the number of leads  
required for a chip has also increased. To handle the  
increased density, there has been developed a ball grid  
array package wherein one or more chips are mounted on the  
top surface of a substrate. The ball grid array package  
20 uses an array of solder balls to provide electrical  
connections between the substrate and a printed circuit  
board. A problem with this type of package is that  
substantial differences in the thermal coefficient of  
expansion can exist between the substrate and the printed  
25 circuit board. Such differences in the thermal coefficient  
of expansion cause plastic deformation of the solder balls.

This problem has been addressed by the use of a  
ceramic column grid array package. The column grid array  
package uses an array of solder columns, rather than solder  
30 balls, to make electrical connections between a ceramic  
substrate and a printed circuit board. The solder columns  
typically have a height of approximately 2.55 mm and a  
diameter of 0.50 mm. The taller configuration of the  
solder columns offers compliancy to better absorb the  
35 differential thermal expansion rate between the ceramic  
column grid array package and the printed circuit board.  
To attach the solder columns to the semiconductor substrate,  
a low melting temperature solder paste is deposited on

electrically conductive contact pads which are, in turn, placed on one side of the ceramic substrate. The solder columns, typically made from a high melting temperature solder using a nominal 90/10 alloy of lead to tin, are  
5 vertically positioned on the corresponding contact pads. The combination is then heated in a reflow oven so that the solder paste is reflowed to make a connection between the solder columns and the pads. Like procedure takes place when the solder columns are attached to the printed circuit  
10 board.

In the manufacture of a ball grid array package, a vacuum pickup tool is typically used to pick up and place a multiplicity of solder balls in the desired pattern on a semiconductor substrate. The spherical shape of the solder  
15 balls makes it easier to pick up and place a full array of solder balls on the substrate. On the other hand, solder columns have a cylindrical shape and must, therefore, be arranged in a fixed orientation during pickup. No means has heretofore been proposed to align a multiplicity of  
20 solder columns in an array before the solder columns are picked up.

Accordingly, it is an object of the present invention to provide an apparatus for aligning and dispensing a plurality of solder columns in an array, so that all the  
25 solder columns can readily be picked up by a vacuum pickup tool.

#### SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

According to the present invention, there is provided an apparatus for aligning and dispensing a plurality of  
30 solder columns in an array, which includes a vibrator and a substantially planar, elongated alignment plate supported on the vibrator. After alignment, the solder columns are positioned in electrically conductive contact pads or terminals which are disposed on one side of a ceramic  
35 substrate. One or more chips are mounted on the other side of the substrate. The solder columns and the substrate are headed in a reflow oven so that the solder columns are adhered to the substrate to form a ceramic column grid

array. The alignment plate includes a plurality of longitudinal guide grooves. The guide grooves are equal in number to the terminals and spaced from each other by a distance substantially equal to the space between each adjacent terminals. A substantially planar cover is fixedly mounted to the alignment plate and shaped to cover part of the guide grooves. A source of solder columns or parts feeder is operatively associated with the alignment plate and adapted to feed or scatter the solder columns over the upstream end of the alignment plate. The solder columns are received in the guide grooves and then fed toward the downstream end of the alignment plate while the alignment plate is vibrated in a longitudinal direction by the vibrator.

In one embodiment, the cover has an upstream end inclined relative to the longitudinal axis of the alignment plate and a straight downstream end. The inclined upstream end of the cover is spaced from the upstream end of the alignment plate so that the solder columns may be fully scattered over the upstream end of the alignment plate. The downstream end of the cover is spaced from the downstream end of the alignment plate by a distance greater than the length of the single solder column and less than twice the length of the solder column. The cover not only removes solder columns which are not received within the guide grooves, or which remain on other solder columns received within the guide grooves, but also, prevents the escape of solder columns once received within the guide grooves. The inclined upstream end of the cover effectively causes those solder columns which are outside of the guide grooves to fall off of the alignment plate. The cover may preferably be transparent.

Preferably, an end plate may be secured to the downstream end of the alignment plate to hold a leading array of solder columns in place within the guide grooves. A vacuum pickup tool may be moved to the downstream end of the alignment plate to pick up the solder columns. Since all the solder columns in the leading array are arranged in

the same orientation, the vacuum pickup tool can readily capture the cylindrical body of the solder columns.

5 In one embodiment, the guide grooves have a width slightly greater than the diameter of the solder columns so that the solder columns may smoothly be slid within the guide grooves. The guide grooves have a rectangular cross section. Alternatively, the guide grooves may have a V-shaped or semicircular cross section.

10 The above and other objects, features and advantages of the present invention will become apparent from the following detailed description of the preferred embodiments of the invention.

#### BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

15 Fig. 1 is a top plan view of an apparatus for aligning and dispensing a plurality of solder columns in an array, assembled according to one embodiment of the present invention;

Fig. 2 is a longitudinal sectional view taken on line II-II in Fig. 1;

20 Fig. 3 is an enlarged partial view of the downstream end of an alignment plate used in the apparatus shown in Fig. 1; and

Fig. 4 is a transverse sectional view taken on line IV-IV in Fig. 3.

#### 25 DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

Referring first to Figs. 1 and 2, there is shown an apparatus, generally designated at 10, for aligning and dispensing a plurality of solder columns in an array according to one embodiment of the present invention. The apparatus 10 includes a vibrator 12 on which an elongated alignment plate 14 is supported. The vibrator 12 is operable to impart vibrations to the alignment plate 14, as will later be described.

35 The alignment plate 14 is generally rectangular in shape and has an upstream end 14a and a downstream end 14b. The alignment plate 14 is slightly downwardly inclined from the upstream end 14a toward the downstream end 14b. Located adjacent to the upstream end 14a of the alignment

plate 14 is a parts feeder 16 as a source of solder columns 18. The parts feeder 16 includes a feeder bawl 20. A spiral track 22 extends around the inner surface of the feeder bawl 20 and terminates at an outlet 24. The outlet 24 is located above the upstream end 14a of the alignment plate 14. As better shown in Fig. 1, the solder columns 18, when fed from the feeder bawl 20 through the outlet 24, are scattered over the upstream end 14a of the alignment plate 14.

10 A plurality of longitudinal guide grooves 26 are defined in the alignment plate 14 to receive and guide the solder columns 18. The guide grooves 26 extend generally parallel to each other. The number of the guide grooves 26 is equal to the number of electrically conductive contact  
15 pads or terminals (not shown) disposed on one side of a substrate of a ceramic column grid array package (not shown). The space between each adjacent guide grooves 26 is also equal to the space between each adjacent contact pads. As shown in Fig. 4, the guide grooves have, but not  
20 limited to, a rectangular cross section. The guide grooves 26 have a width slightly greater than the diameter of the solder columns 18 so that the solder columns 18 can readily be slid within the guide grooves 26. An end plate or stopper 28 is secured to the downstream end 14b of the  
25 alignment plate 14 to hold a leading array of solder columns 18 in place, as shown in Fig. 3.

A substantially planar transparent cover 30 is fixedly mounted on the upper surface of the alignment plate 14 by bolts 32. The transparent cover 30 has an upstream  
30 end 30a and a downstream end 30b. The upstream end 30a of the cover 30 is inclined relative to the longitudinal axis of the alignment plate 14. The inclined upstream end 30a of the cover 30 is spaced a sufficient distance from the outlet 24 to permit scattering of the solder columns 18  
35 over the upstream end 14a of the alignment plate 14. As better shown in Fig. 3, the straight downstream end 30b of the cover 30 is spaced from the straight downstream end 14b of the alignment plate 14 by a distance slightly greater

than the length of the single solder column 18. Preferably, this distance is less than twice the length of the solder column.

5 An inclined collection tray or chute 34 is supported on the vibrator 12 and located below and adjacent to the upstream end 14a of the alignment plate 14 so as to collect those solder columns 18 which are not properly received in any of the guide grooves 26. The collection chute 34 has a planar base or bottom plate 34a, a pair of side plates 34b  
10 secured to opposite sides of the bottom plate 34a, and an end plate 34c secured to the upper end of the bottom plate 34a. A rectangular collection box 36 is located adjacent to the open lower end of the collection chute 34 to receive solder columns from the collection chute 34.

15 In operation, the vibrator 12 is rendered operative to vibrate the alignment plate 14 in the longitudinal direction. At the same time, the parts feeder 16 is rendered operative to feed the solder columns 18 upwardly along the track 22 of the feeder bawl 20. The solder  
20 columns 18 are then fed out of the feeder bawl 20 through the outlet 24 and scattered over the upstream end 14a of the alignment plate 14. A substantial part of the solder columns 18 is received in the guide grooves 26. However, some of the solder columns 18 may remain outside the guide  
25 grooves 26. Those solder columns are brought into contact with the inclined upstream end 30a of the transparent cover 30 while the alignment plate 14 is vibrated by the vibrator 12. The inclined upstream end 30a of the cover effectively causes those solder columns to slide on the collection  
30 chute 34 and fall into the collection box 36.

The solder columns 18, fully received within the guide grooves 26, are fed toward the downstream end 14b of the alignment plate 14 during vibration of the alignment plate 14 and arranged in an end-to-end relationship. As  
35 shown in Fig. 3, the leading solder columns in the respective guide grooves 26 are stopped when they are brought into contact with the end plate 28. These leading solder columns collectively form a first array of solder

columns. A vacuum pickup tool or fixture (not shown) is moved to the downstream end 14b of the alignment plate 14. The vacuum pickup tool captures the cylindrical body of the solder columns 18 and then, transfers the solder columns 18  
5 to a next station wherein the solder columns are attached to a ceramic substrate (not shown).

Although the present invention has been described with respect to its preferred embodiment, it is to be understood that various modifications and changes may be  
10 made without departing from the scope of the invention as defined by the appended claims.